

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-5 (Cancelled)

Claim 6. (Currently Amended) A method for the production of a slab of ceramic material, comprising the stages of:

- (i) providing a temporary support layer and arranging on top of said temporary support layer a first sheet of cardboard or paperboard,
- (ii) depositing in a metered quantity a mixture of a granulated material and a water-based binder on a said first support sheet of cardboard or paperboard made with a porous material,
- (iii) applying a vibrating compression under vacuum to the mixture so as to obtain a "virgin" slab,
- ~~(iii)~~ (iv) drying the "virgin" slab while it is deposited on a second support made with a porous material so as to obtain a dried slab,
- (iv) depositing the dried slab on a protective layer of refractory material,
- (vi) firing the dried slab while the slab is deposited onto said protective layer,

~~wherein a first sheet of cardboard or paperboard is used as the first support and a second sheet of cardboard or paperboard is applied onto the mixture layer prior to the stage (iii) of vibrating compression under vacuum so as to have the mixture layer enclosed between two sheets of cardboard or paperboard of sufficient thickness for absorbing the excess mixture water, and~~

wherein said first and second sheets of cardboard or paperboard are removed prior to said drying stage (iv).

Claim 7. (Currently Amended) Method for the production of a slab of ceramic material according to Claim 6, wherein at the end of the stage (iii) of vibrating compression under vacuum the said second sheet of cardboard or paperboard is removed, and replaced by a cloth or felt and thereafter an additional stage (v) takes place in which

the slab is overturned so that said cloth or felt becomes the second support made with porous material of the "virgin" slab during the drying stage (iii iv).

Claim 8. (Currently Amended) Method for the production of a slab of ceramic material according to Claim 7, wherein the mixture is deposited not only on said first sheet of cardboard or paperboard but also on a said temporary support layer positioned under said first sheet of cardboard or paperboard, and

wherein said temporary support layer and said first sheet of cardboard or paperboard are removed after the said additional stage (vi) in which the slab is overturned after the stage (iii) of vibrating compression under vacuum and prior to the drying stage (iii iv).

Claim 9. (Currently Amended) Method for the production of a slab of ceramic material according to Claim 8, wherein said temporary support layer positioned under said first sheet of cardboard or paperboard consists of one of a cloth, a felt, or a rubberized tape.

Claim 10. (Currently Amended) Method for the production of a slab of ceramic material according to Claim 7, wherein after said drying stage (iii iv), the dried slab is raised so as to remove said second support made with a porous material.